


A Close-up Look at Utah's Counties

What is HOT and What is NOT



As an old year ends and a new one begins, the natural inclination to review the past nudges at our psyche. So let's give into the urge. But, in this case let's look back—way back—to discover which counties have experienced the strongest economic growth over the past 20 years.

It's the Best

The best available measure of a county's economic well-being has to be its rate of job growth. This “concurrent” indicator tracks very closely with cycles of boom and bust, or expansion and recession. Plus, it represents some of the most accurate data around. (All right, this department collects that data, but we aren't biased.) At the writing of this article, 2006 annual data was not yet available, so we'll cover the 1985-to-2005 time period. Remember 1985? The first Ford Taurus rolled off the assembly line, Ronald Reagan was

Did you know?

- A developer who said he holds rights to buy the once-bankrupt Elk Meadows ski area in Beaver has plans for 1,200 trophy homes and condominiums, a Jack Nicklaus-commissioned golf course and other development totaling \$3.5 billion. *The Deseret Morning News*
- Dillard's has opened a new 90,000-square-foot store in Red Cliffs Mall in St. George. The new store is located at the east end of the mall in the building formerly occupied by Wal-Mart. *The Spectrum*
- Brian Head officials have decided to give the OK for a \$900,000 skier bridge that will span state Route 143 and help connect Brian Head Resort's two mountains in Iron County. In addition to the skier bridge that the town would purchase, the resort will invest about \$8 million in improvements. *The Spectrum*

president and U.S. unemployment registered above 7 percent.


To put the county numbers in perspective, what happened statewide and nationally? In Utah between 1985 and 2005, jobs increased by 84 percent—more than twice the rate of the national job expansion (37 percent). Overall, the four main Wasatch Front counties—Salt Lake, Davis, Weber, and Utah—showed slower-than-average expansion of 80 percent. On the other hand, the remaining off-the-Front counties experienced 99-percent expansion over the past 20 years. In other words, jobs outside the Wasatch Front almost doubled.

Who is Hot?

As with most indicators, counties located outside the Wasatch Front corridor displayed a wide array of economic performance. However, the counties which experienced the most rapid employment expansion were located outside the state's major metropolitan areas. Red-hot growth in Washington County is vividly illustrated by the fact that between 1985 and 2005, jobs quintupled—an increase of more than 400 percent! Two other southwestern counties—Iron and Kane—also took their place among the top five fastest-growing employment counties in Utah. Two Wasatch Front fringe counties—Summit and Wasatch—rounded out the top five.

Roughly one-third of Utah's counties at least doubled their jobs over the last 20 years. Only one of those counties—Utah County—could be counted as a member of the Wasatch Front.

Who is Not?

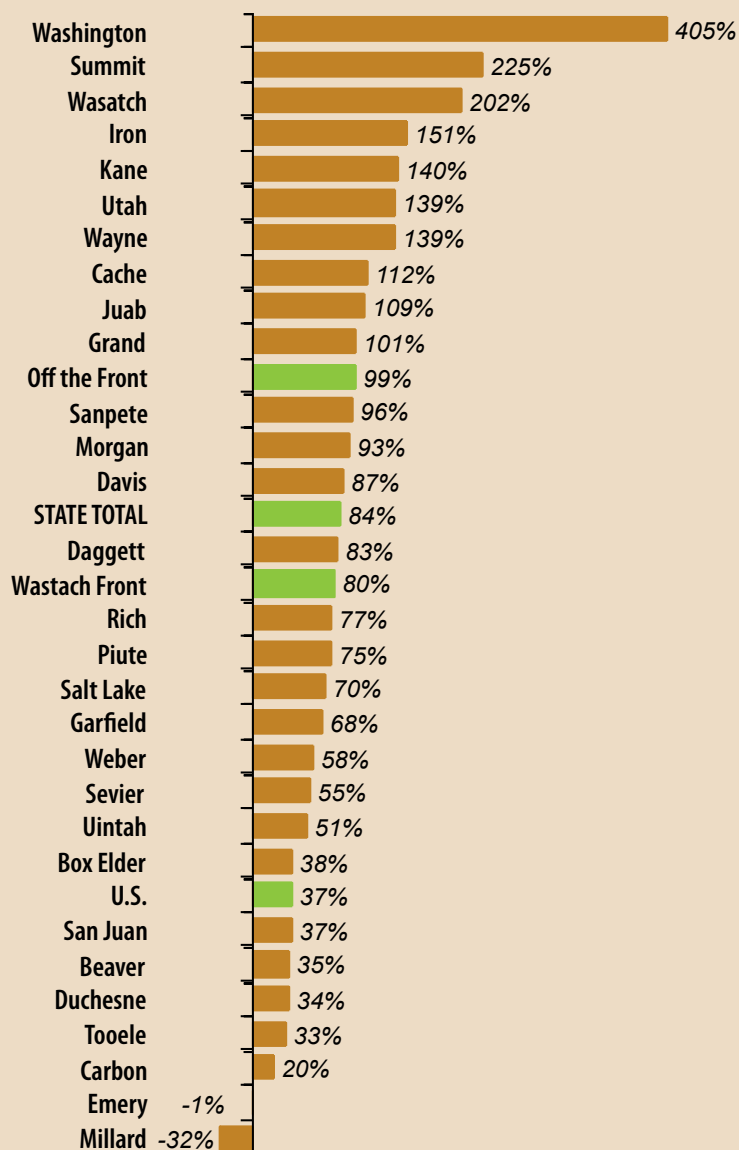
On the other end of the spectrum, Millard and Emery counties' employment measures less today than 20 years ago. In the case of Millard County, Intermountain Power Plant construction produced a temporary swell in the base year. Emery County's employment registered only a slight decline. Slow-growing counties included San Juan, Beaver, Duchesne, Tooele, and Carbon counties. However, remember that these numbers cover two decades. Several of these counties are currently experiencing rapid expansion. For example, Duchesne County's current job-growth rate registers in the double-digit range. 

For more information on Utah's counties:

<http://jobs.utah.gov/jsp/wi/utalmis/gotoCounties.do>

Growth in Non-farm Jobs

1985 - 2005



Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services